

Conducting Assessment with Preschool Children with Special Needs Placed in Least Restrictive Environments

All preschool children with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are the responsibility of the school district in which they reside, regardless of their placement, the type or extent of special education services provided and their status as being dual enrolled in two different programs (e.g. Head Start in the morning, district preschool in the afternoon). This responsibility includes ensuring that a subscription to GOLD has been purchased, an online portfolio has been created and assessment data has been entered accurately and on time for children placed in least restrictive environments such as Head Start programs, private placements and children receiving services on an itinerant basis.

The educator or service provider that has the greatest degree of interaction with the child should be responsible for completing the GOLD assessment. Those working with the child should come to an agreement about who will have primary responsibility for final ratings based on data that is entered from all team members. In the case of Head Start, community education classroom and private preschool, this would typically be the classroom teacher. In the case of itinerant services, this would typically be the speech-language pathologist. In all cases, district administrators will have access to the online portfolios of children with special needs. ***We encourage representatives from both the Head Start program (or other program) and the district to have a conversation and come to an agreement regarding a shared child's GOLD assessment. We further encourage these representatives to put these decisions in writing (ie: in written process/procedures or in the MOU).*** Within the process and procedures that are created, document the name(s) of the person(s) responsible for conducting the assessment as well as in the IEP under the assessment section.

In the case of children enrolled in both Head Start and district preschool, staff from both programs can enter documentation in online portfolios. Staff from the district and the Head Start should reach consensus regarding the ratings chosen for children enrolled in both programs. A teacher or other designee at the district will be responsible for physically entering the ratings and finalizing data at each checkpoint date within the online portfolios for these children.

Sharing Access to Child Portfolios

Each child should only have one portfolio. Through a GOLD function called "*Team Central*", program administrators can grant access to multiple professionals that are working with particular children if desired, including related service providers, paraprofessionals and staff from other programs serving the child. Giving individuals access to GOLD through *Team Central* is different than adding them as regular users in that it restricts their access to *only specific children* and not an entire class of children.

In the case of preschool children with special needs, staff of the program where children are placed will have full access to the portfolios of these particular children, enabling them to enter documentation and rate children's progress. Since the responsibility for meeting assessment requirements ultimately belongs to the school district in which the child resides, administrators at the responsible district can be given access to these particular online portfolios (**available September 2011**). This enables both the district and the program serving the child to be accountable for the assessment process. Districts are responsible for the cost of each child subscription unless other arrangements have been agreed upon between both programs. Such arrangements should be established and documented, along with roles and responsibilities of each program, in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). *(continued on next page)*

Conducting Assessment with Children Receiving Itinerant or Home-based Services

Many preschool children in Arizona receive special education services on an itinerant or home-based basis only. This means that children do not participate in a preschool classroom in which a teacher can observe their development. In this scenario, the related service provider or home-based visitor may be the only professional that sees the child regularly and is responsible for conducting the assessment. This can be very challenging due to the limited time and context in which a service provider sees the children on his or her caseload.

Below are suggestions for service providers responsible for conducting assessments:

- Plan therapy sessions based on play activities so that developmental skills might naturally be observed, independent of direct interventions. Observe for multiple measures during a single activity.
 - Replace a few individual 1:1 sessions for children with services for children in small groups and in various settings, e.g. park, library activity groups. This would allow for the observation of skills, generalization of skills, and opportunities for peer interactions. Set up play groups offering typical children a preschool environment as typical peers. If available, spend one day per week providing services in the classroom/center/common site to allow data gathering in a typical daily environment.
 - Explain to parents the type of information you want to gather about their children and why. Create a plan to regularly collect information from parents via email, phone, in person or other means. Ask families to share photos, drawings, or other examples of a child's skills to inform ratings of specific measures
 - Use intake information to inform ratings, e.g. referrals from Head Start might include information that addresses all developmental domains. Include questions on intake forms for parents and referring teachers targeted to specific measures.
 - Think about where children spend their time and identify potential collaborators that can share observations, work samples, photos, etc. (i.e. child care provider, teacher at faith-based center).
- During IEP development, under "Time," identify a

specific number of days for direct sessions and a specific number of days for consultation/collaboration. Plan to work a portion of the time in a variety of settings and identify these settings on the IEP. Identify in the IEP that one week a month is dedicated to diagnostic observations of a child.

These suggestions were adapted from the Napa County Office of Education. More suggestions can be seen at:

draccess.org/assessors/guidancefordrdp/StrategiesToSupportSLPs.html

GOLD Nuggets is a new publication from the ADE Early Childhood Education unit intended to share "nuggets" of information specific to the statewide implementation of the new assessment instrument, Teaching Strategies GOLD. Arizona-specific policies, helpful hints and other important announcements related to GOLD will be shared through this document.

Contact Holly Ford at 602-542-2790 or holly.ford@azed.gov with questions and/or to receive previous issues of GOLD Nuggets.

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